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ABSTRACT

Activities on behalf of Roma/Gypsies have always been an important part of the Council of Europe's minority protection policy. The topics discussed are how more training opportunities can be provided for young Roma people and other ways to support and promote their participation in society. This report on the long-term training course that the Council of Europe Youth Directorate organized for Roma/Gypsy youth leaders is mainly intended for those interested in playing an active role in training young Roma/Gypsy people responsible for international projects within their local communities, as part of a regional, national, or Europe-wide effort. After describing the background to the course, the report highlights a number of related themes such as the European dimension and intercultural implications. Lastly, it examines the future of Roma/Gypsy youth work. Comments by course participants also are included in the report. (Sections contain footnotes.) (BT)

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Report on the International Training Course for Roma/Gypsy Youth Leaders

European Youth Center of Europe
Strasbourg, 2 - 14 March 1999

Council of Europe
Youth Directorate
30 rue Pierre de Coubertin
F-67000 Strasbourg
Tel: + 33 (0) 3 88 41 23 00
Fax: + 33 (0) 3 88 41 27 77
Web: http://www.coe.fr/youth

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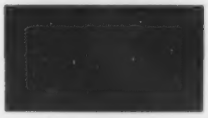

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Foreword

"Between Europe and my community: young Roma/ Gypsies1 and their communities, training can make a difference"

by Alexandra Raykova 2

What does it mean to be a Roma in Europe today?

Being a Roma in Europe today means facing every day discrimination, unemployment, social problems, facing the prejudices and the negative image that the society has of you, only because you belong to a different culture, because you have different values, a different ethnic background, a different name and sometimes a darker colour of skin. This is what it means to be Roma - the largest minority group in Europe today.

It does not matter if you are a Roma from Albania or from Spain, if you are a Roma from Ukraine or from Greece. It does not matter either how you call yourself - Roma or Hitanos, Sinti or Manush 3 - , because in addition to the blood we all share the same problems, with different nuances. And if somebody tells me: "This is because Roma people are different!", then I will answer: "Yes, Roma people are different and only their culture makes them different. In all other things we are equal to the people we live with. We are born, we live, we love and we die like all of the people in the world".

I ask myself then why, at the end of the twentieth century, there are still people living without water, who face every day the challenge of how to find bread for their children, who are not able to send them to school, because the children just have no shoes to wear, and anyway - what is the sense of sending them to school when even with an education they will still not be able to get a job? I have still not found the answer, but I hope that we can fight and look for solutions to these problems together, because we all want our children to live in a better world, if not today, then at least tomorrow.

What does it mean to be a young Roma in Europe today?

Being a young Roma in Europe today means to live every day with the problems of your family, with your neighbours and with the reality of your community. To live without pocket money. To be unable to see any opportunity in society to change your life. To have your values clashing

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not only with the values of society, but also with the values of the older generation in your community. To have a lower status there also, because you should respect the traditions of the community and follow the decisions of the family. The authorities and the existing associations do not care to help you to find your own way in this life, and nobody is interested in developing you as a competent and motivated person who can develop him/herself and can contribute to the development of his/her community and the larger society.

If you are living in a situation like this, what will be the easiest way for you to behave, especially if you have no positive role models from the community around you? You are going to follow the negative role models, of whom everybody knows how they reached their better status in the community. And then you can easily drop out of school, try drugs and even find yourself involved in crimes.

Of course, when we speak of the young Roma people, we should consider that not all of the young people live in the same situation, because there are also two other much smaller groups: first, the young and well educated Roma, who are part of another social class and prefer to forget the name Roma, and second, the young Roma, well and not so well educated, who are motivated and working for a better future of their community.

What are the needs of young Roma?

As every young person, and probably even more strongly so, young Roma need to have positive role models from their own community whith whom they can easily identify, whom they will be willing and able to follow. They need young Roma who can improve their self-esteem, give them a positive view on life and something to work for (e.g. for themselves or for their communities), improve their motivation and, at the same time, give them the necessary social skills for this.

Young Roma need somebody to show them the existing opportunities for personal or professional development that are offered by society, if there are any. They need somebody to organise their free time. They - and also their societies - need them to be active citizens and to participate at all levels and processes in their societies. Another question is if and how both sides see this as an existing opportunity and process.

We all know the necessary preconditions to participation: structure, access, competence and motivation, and I would like to look at some of these, namely structure and competence, from a different angle.

What are the existing structures that are dealing with the problems of young Roma people at different levels? And what is their role in promoting their participation and in breaking the existing exclusion of this minority group from the society, and their self- exclusion on the other side?

At what stage is the Youth Roma movement?

It was not very long ago, and it is still the reality in some communities, that no distinction was made between the problems and needs of the Roma community in general and the particular needs and problems of young Roma. Fortunately, almost five years ago the situation started to change. The NGOs working on Roma issues started to work also on issues concerning young Roma. Youth associations were established at different levels and in different countries.

At about that time, the Council of Europe organised the first activity with young Roma from different European countries, the "training course for Roma Youth Leaders", held under the Campaign against Racism, Anti-semitism, Xenophobia and Intolerance. I had the pleasure to participate in it, and it gave me a lot of motivation and self-confidence. At this course, the idea for the establishment of a Roma IYNGO was born. Today, the Forum of European Roma Young People (FERYP **4**) is a reality. And I should point out the fact that this is not the only Roma INGYO in Europe.

So, the structure, even if only in child status, is existing presently at local and also at European level. Now what is the major need that should be addressed to deal with the problems of the Roma community in general, and in particular of young Roma people? Competence, I think, to develop those structures and to be able to carry out the programmes and projects of these associations and, moreover, support, be it purely technical, including money, or moral support.

Back to competence - **One of the greatest opportunities in getting training** that young Roma were able to gain was participation in the training activities that were organised by the Council of Europe and last year within the partnership with the European Commission. They received serious training on how to plan and carry out, within the framework of their association, effective projects and programmes of relevance for the Roma community. And on how to involve other young Roma in their work. They had the opportunity to share their experiences and motivation with other young Roma or other minority young people, to obtain information about institutions and structures relevant to their work, to discuss a number of political issues which are concerning their everyday lives, to reflect upon their own culture and on the relations between Roma and non- Roma people and, finally, on what is our perception about Europe and our place in it.

*As a result of these trainings we have an impact on these young people as individuals, on their **associations, on the community and also at a more global level.***

How?

These trainings are widening the participants' horizons. Well trained, competent young Roma leaders and workers who come back to their

local level can be a very important resource for the development and concrete work of their organisation. They are able to plan and implement relevant projects and activities, they are self-confident, motivated and also able to be role models and leaders for the other young Roma around them. They are able to multiply their experience and to pass on their knowledge and skills. They are able to work for a better tomorrow of the Roma youth, the Roma community, their society and hopefully also the world in which we live.

The questions remain.

How can we provide opportunities for more young Roma people to be trained? And what are the other ways to support and promote their participation in society?

Have you got the answer? What you are going to do?

Footnotes

1 In general the terminology used is different from one community to the other, from one organisation to the other, from one author to the other. Indeed in the present document we chose to use the term « Roma/ Gypsy » as a generic term knowing that « Roma » is used in general in East and Central Europe and « Gypsy » more in Western Europe.

2. This text by Alexandra RAYKOVA was written for the first issue of « *Coyote* » (issue 0 - July 1999), the new periodical publication of the partnership between the Council of Europe Youth Directorate and the European Commission DGXXII. The publication is addressed to youth Trainers working at European level.

3. Names of different ethnies.

4. FERYP : Forum of the European Roma Young People, initiated following a reflection seminar in Budapest in 1996, by a group of young Roma/ Gypsies from different European countries. The European statutes voted in Bucharest in March 1998 are in the process of being adopted by the relevant authorities.

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INTRODUCTION

This is a report on the long-term training course which the Council of Europe Youth Directorate organised for young Roma/Gypsy youth leaders as part of its follow-up to the Campaign against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Intolerance.

The programme, which began in Helsinki in October 1997 and came to a close in March 1999 in Strasbourg, was run under the partnership agreement between the Youth Directorate and DG XXII of the European Commission .

This report was jointly written by all the trainers on the course. It is mainly intended for those interested in going on to play an active role in training young Roma/Gypsy people responsible for international projects within their local communities, as part of a regional, national or Europe-wide effort.

After describing the background to the course, we shall highlight a number of related themes such as the European dimension and intercultural implications. Lastly, we shall examine the future of Roma/Gypsy youth work.

Comments by the course participants are also included.

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Background to the Course

Activities on behalf of Roma/Gypsies have always been an important part of the Council of Europe's minority protection policy. Yet the situation of Roma/Gypsies in Europe remains a cause for concern. As victims of exclusion, discrimination and racism, and because they generally have little access to information and are poorly organised, Roma/Gypsies and Travellers were a major target of the European Youth Campaign against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Intolerance, which ran from 1994 to 1996.

Accordingly, a Co-ordinator of Activities on Roma/Gypsies was appointed to the Directorate of Social and Economic Affairs (DASE) in 1994. At the same time the Youth Directorate began to organise training programmes with a view to improving the representation and participation of young Roma/Gypsies at European level.

Following an initial training course for young Roma/Gypsies and Travellers, held in 1995 at the Strasbourg European Youth Centre (EYC) as part of the Campaign against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Intolerance, the Youth Directorate decided to take the work on behalf of Roma/Gypsies further by trying to encourage them to participate in Europe-wide activities. It did this by developing associations run by young Roma/Gypsies and providing educational expertise and financial support.

1995:
April, European Youth Centre (EYC) Strasbourg (France):
Training course for young Roma, Gypsies and Travellers.
Funding: Campaign

1996:
September, EYC Budapest (Hungary):
"Study session" organised at the initiative of a participant in a Youth Directorate training course.
Setting up of the Forum of European Roma Young People (FERYP), a Roma/Gypsy youth network.
Funding: EYC

1996:
September, EYC Budapest
Seminar for young Romni[1], jointly organised by WFM (Women from Minorities), the Friends of Rromani Baxt, the Association of Roma Students in Romania and the Association of Roma Women Participating in Public Life.

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Funding: the European Union's Youth for Europe programme and the European Youth Foundation (EYF)

1997:
February, Valencia (Spain)
Meeting of FERYP co-ordinators to define aims and objectives, work out action strategies and identify training needs.
Funding: EYF grant.

1997:
late October to early November, Helsinki (Finland)
First stage of the long-term training course run by the Youth Directorate in partnership with the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, DG XXII of the European Commission, Allianssi (the Finnish National Youth Council) and the DASE.

1998:
March, Bucharest
Discussion seminar on the development of the network and its activities in the coming years.
Funding: EYF grant

1998:
July, EYC Strasbourg
Study session organised by FERYP on the participation of young Roma/Gypsies at European level.
Funding: EYC

1999:
March, EYC Strasbourg
Second stage of the long-term training course run by the Youth Directorate in partnership with DG XXII of the European Commission and the Directorate on Social and Economic Affairs of the Council of Europe.

Of these activities, only the training courses were Youth Directorate initiatives, the other events having been initiated by Roma/Gypsy organisations.

Since 1996 the Youth Directorate and the Co-ordinator of Activities on Roma/Gypsies have worked closely together on Roma/Gypsy youth issues, replying to requests, meeting field workers and association representatives in their home environment, and providing ongoing support - particularly advice - to new organisations.

Following the 1995 training course, other international Roma/Gypsy youth organisations were set up. These were the youth section of the Roma National Congress and EUROTERNNET, which arose from the 1997 European Congress of Gypsy Youth, organised by the Union Romani in Barcelona.

In conclusion, the current growth of associations, which began four years ago, demonstrates that:

- it is both possible and rewarding, despite earlier reservations, to work with young Roma/Gypsy people at European level;
- the pattern of development has been very positive (with the creation of three international networks or umbrella groups of young Roma/Gypsies) and encouraging for the growth of local associations;
- young people are ready and willing to run projects in their communities. Often these projects are important factors in improving local living conditions;
- there is nonetheless still a huge need for training.

a. A long-term training programme

Following the 1995 training course, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe decided to fund in 1997 a follow-up course to the training activities carried out on behalf of young Roma/Gypsies as part of the Campaign against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Intolerance.

Given the training needs and the importance of encouraging and supporting the growth of Roma/Gypsy associations, it was thought important to plan this as a long-term training programme which would assist in the development of local associations and help them to manage their own projects.

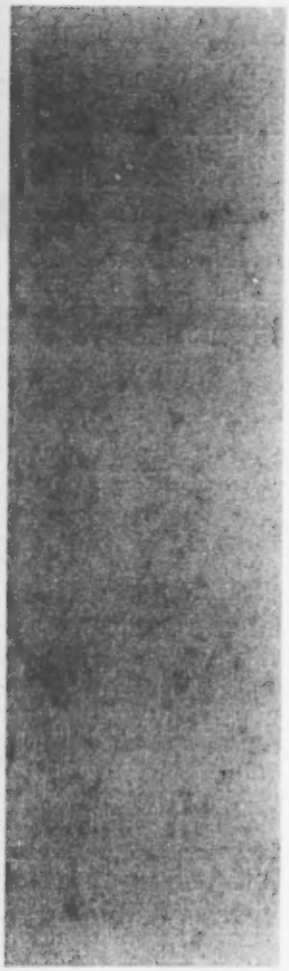
The training programme was structured as follows:

- **First stage, October 1997:** launch of projects (Helsinki);
- **Intermediate stage**: running of projects in local communities with educational input from local trainers;
- **Third stage**: project evaluation (planned for September 1998 at the Strasbourg EYC).

Unfortunately, for technical and financial reasons the evaluation stage could not be held until March 1999.

More specifically, the following difficulties were encountered:

- firstly, the use of four working languages in particular made the course expensive, and it was difficult to raise the ***necessary funding***;
- secondly, although contacts were regularly maintained and the trainers ensured ongoing supervision between the launch of projects in October 1997 and the postponed evaluation stage in March 1999, we had some difficulty in ***bringing participants together again***. In some cases motivation had waned because of setbacks in carrying out the projects, participants were unavailable



or had taken on new professional responsibilities, or there were administrative problems (no visa or insufficient funds to cover travel expenses).

b. Partnerships

The social status of Roma/Gypsies is a political concern shared by several European organisations, including the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the European Union. All would like to improve the integration and participation of Roma/Gypsies in European life. The training was accordingly aimed at different partners.

We received financial support from various partners in the implementation stage (1997 to 1999):

- the **1997 course** was organised by the Youth Directorate in partnership with DG XXII of the European Commission, the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Allianssi (the Finnish National Youth Council) and the DASE;
- the **March 1999 course** was run under the **partnership agreement between the Youth Directorate and DG XXII of the European Commission** on European youth worker training. Additional support was forthcoming from the **DASE Special Fund for Roma**.

Footnote
1 Roma/Gypsy women. **Back to text**

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The Course

a. The team

The team comprised three Roma/Gypsy trainers, one independent trainer and two Youth Directorate tutors:

- **Alexandra Raykova** (Roma, Bulgaria) took part in the 1995 training course. From 1997 on she worked as a trainer on various Youth Directorate activities (long-term training course on "Participation and Citizenship" for minorities);
- **Demetrio Gomez-Avila** (Gypsy, Spain), a trainer and expert on Gypsy culture, took part in the 1996 Roma/Gypsy study session in Budapest, in a Youth Directorate course for trainers and in other international Roma/Gypsy activities;
- **Angela Kocze** (Roma, Hungary), a sociology student working at the European Roma Rights Centre in Budapest, took part in the 1995 course;
- **Rui Gomes** (Portugal/Sweden) is an independent trainer and a former Youth Directorate tutor who was involved in the 1995 training course for young Roma, Gypsies and Travellers and in a number of subsequent activities;
- **Corinne Grassi** is a Youth Directorate tutor with responsibility (since 1996) for Roma/Gypsy youth issues. She has been involved in all activities since the 1995 course;
- **Anne Dussap** is a Youth Directorate tutor with responsibility (since 1999) for Roma/Gypsy youth issues. She has been involved in Roma/Gypsy activities since 1997.

The team was chosen on the basis of several criteria:

- skills and the ability to work together;
- knowledge and experience of work with Roma/Gypsies, youth work and international projects;
- the need to be representative: at least half of the team had to come from Roma/Gypsy communities;
- the need for a balance between the countries represented;
- knowledge of Romanes [1] by at least some of the team.

b. Working languages (English, French, Spanish and Romanes)

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Although Roma/Gypsies are aware of their common culture, historical and political realities have meant that the Romanes tongue varies from place to place, depending on particular circumstances and on how much importance is accorded to their culture and language.

It is therefore not feasible to use Romanes as the only working language. And although many participants are naturally bilingual in a local variant of Romanes and the language of their country of residence, finding a second common language is no easy task.

Despite the burden on the budget, therefore, we found it necessary to use four languages:

- firstly, because those with whom we work are frequently disadvantaged, with little schooling (and consequently less chance of having learned a foreign language) and little or no experience of an international training environment;
- secondly, the use of four working languages meant that Roma/Gypsy participants could be invited from every region of Europe without being unfair to anyone.

c. Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the long-term training course, which began in 1997 and was scheduled to end in September 1998, was **to give young Roma/Gypsy leaders the skills necessary to plan community-based projects for the purpose of strengthening civil society in Europe on the basis of participation**. The training concentrated on three interrelated areas:

- how to set up and run projects in the community;
- how to use a project to promote community involvement;
- how to open the way for participation at European level.

Since nearly 18 months passed between November 1997 (Helsinki) and March 1999, and it was therefore difficult to retain the same course participants, the group had to be opened up to new people and the goals adapted accordingly.

It was important to continue evaluating the projects launched in Helsinki, while at the same time teaching participants a number of basic general techniques for managing projects and associations.

Our objectives were chosen so as to reflect needs arising from the Helsinki training session, as expressed in particular through evaluations made during that course and regular contact with participants during the intermediate phase. They also drew on the supervision of participants running projects and on other needs identified by monitoring Roma/Gypsy association activities in a more general way.

Objectives

- to provide information on the European institutions (Council of Europe, EU and OSCE) and existing international Roma/Gypsy organisations;
- to provide an opportunity to reflect upon and gain a better understanding of the role of youth leaders and their associations in the context of civil society and the existing network of Roma/Gypsy associations;
- to improve the basic skills needed to set up and run projects and manage Roma/Gypsy associations (including motivation/participation, intercultural learning, communication and management skills);
- to give participants an opportunity to share working methods, and to provide data for project evaluation (e.g. by evaluating the projects begun in Helsinki, encouraging co-operation between associations and organising visits to local associations).

d. Method

During initial discussions on the training, in 1997, it was planned to use this course to evaluate the projects devised in Helsinki. Following the changes made to the composition of the group, it was also necessary to make changes to the working method, so that the "newcomers" could be properly integrated.

There were five main features of the course programme:

- *information and familiarity*
  - information on the institutional set-up and the possibility of funding;
  - getting to know other participants and comparing notes;
- *the cultural/intercultural dimension* – an important community aspect (majority/minority cultures, cultural implications in Europe);

- *workshops* (on leadership, motivation, fundraising and budget planning, communication, identity and culture, intercultural learning and organisation management). These took half a day each and were designed either to provide practical skills for running projects and organisations, or to explore certain questions in more detail. They were chosen to meet the training needs identified during previous activities and to respond to participants' requests;

- a more general examination of *the role of associations in civil society*, with information on existing international networks, different concepts of leadership etc;

- *converting skills into practice* – how to put lessons learned to use in the real world.

We tried to vary the methods of instruction used during the course. They included the sharing of ideas between participants, plenary sessions alternating with working groups, workshops, role-playing, round tables, discussion groups and field visits. The main technique, however, was that of "learning by doing".

It was important, in an international context with different working languages and situations and with participants relatively unfamiliar with the idea of training, to make room for the practical experience of those present. This was done in the following ways:

- the projects carried out since Helsinki were evaluated and used as a basis for developing a project methodology;
- time was set aside for participants to share their professional or personal experience (both positive and negative) ;
- there was an opportunity to inspect projects being run locally so as to obtain a common set of references.

Footnotes

1 This is the name given to the Roma/Gypsy language. It is first and foremost a spoken language, in part deriving closely from Sanskrit, and varies from one country to another under the influence of local languages. Some philologists are now attempting to standardise Romani.

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The participants

a. Terms such as "leader" and "animator" – a source of confusion and ambiguity

It was noted on several occasions during discussion on the role of "animators" and "leaders" that these terms have different language and culture-specific meanings. Despite the fact that most participants clearly played an important role in their local communities, for a number of them these terms did not always have a precise meaning.

Roma/Gypsy organisations are still relatively new, and many do not have youth sections. What is more, there is not yet a specific place for youth associations in the Roma/Gypsy context. Effectively, therefore, there is no concept of youth leader or animator, and nobody is responsible for issues affecting young people. As a result, the people we were seeking to reach do not really exist per se within the community. At the same time, since 1995 there has been a drive to promote the work and participation of young Roma/Gypsies at European level.

The course thus included a number of more general aspects which were not related exclusively to youth work, such as knowledge of the European institutions and their programmes, Human Rights, politics and practical skills.

b. Initial profile of participants

The course was initially aimed at young Roma/Gypsy leaders who were:

- involved in local, regional or national associations and interested in working on projects which would benefit Roma/Gypsy communities, especially those on behalf of and with young Roma/Gypsy people;
- committed to beginning and following up a project within the framework of the training programme;
- able and willing to take part in the course from beginning to end;
- supported by their organisations or associations;
- able to work in Romanes, English, French or Spanish;
- between 20 and 30 years old.

New participants had to:

- be Roma/Gypsies;

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- be active members of Roma/Gypsy associations;
- have already taken part in a Youth Directorate activity or have at least some experience of international Roma/Gypsy youth work.

c. A mixed bunch

The preparatory team had therefore assembled a relatively heterogeneous group. Nonetheless, the initial selection criteria had been respected as far as possible. Some of the participants had direct responsibility within their organisations for programmes specifically targeting children or young people, including:

- remedial classes at evenings or weekends;
- foreign language classes;
- youth clubs;
- music, dance, photography and video production courses.

Overall, the participants' responsibilities were as follows:

- local project leaders;
- association officers;
- professionals (including social workers, social and cultural mediators, a programme co-ordinator and a psychologist);
- programme co-ordinators at national (employment office) and international level (the Soros Foundation's Open Society Institute);
- Roma/Gypsy activists;
- young people with political responsibilities in local government and at national level (members of political parties and government committees, and a member of Parliament);
- volunteers in non-Roma/ Gypsy organisations;
- young people with or without previous experience of running projects at local, national or international level;
- young people with or without previous experience of training courses at national or international level;
- young people already in contact (or otherwise) with other Roma/Gypsies in other countries.

A final remark: some participants had difficulty communicating owing to their imperfect knowledge of a second or third language. However, when this situation arose other participants were very willing to show solidarity by helping those in difficulty to play an active part in the group.

d. **Expectations of participants**

- To learn the different steps in setting up a viable project;
- to gain experience and a knowledge of working methods;
- to make the acquaintance of organisations and individuals
- in other countries with a view to working together;
- for those who had not been in Helsinki, to hear about the

experiences (success, setbacks, lessons learned etc.) of those running projects since 1997.

Participants came from the following organisations and countries:

COUNTRY	Number of participants	Organisations represented (some participants belonged to two organisations)
Albania	2	"Rromani Baxt"
Bulgaria	3	"Roma-Lom Foundation" "United Roma Committee"
Czech Republic	1	"Roma Democratic Union"
France	2	"SOS Aide aux habitants" "Animation Jeunes du Polygone" "Appona" "De la source à la mer"
Greéce	3	"Filoxenia" "Panhellenic Cultural Association of Greek Roma"
Hungary	4	"Common Fate" "Open Society Institute" "Roma Cultural and Educational Association" "National Employment Foundation"
Romania	2	"Association of Roma Students" "Romani CRISS"

"The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"	2	"PCRM" "Anglunipe" "Open Society Institute "
Ukraine	2	"Roma Association ando Izmail"

The following withdrew at the last moment:

Finland	1	Romani Projekti
Germany	1	Rom e.V
Portugal	1	"Associao Olho Vivo"
Spain	3	Plataforma de Jóvenes Gitanos de Aragón Federación de Asociación Jachivela
Sweden	1	Romani Projekti

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The European dimension of the course

During the course, much consideration was given to the European dimension, which was discussed at various points, using a range of methods tailored to specific social and educational objectives.

One of the paradoxes of Roma/Gypsy communities in Europe is that they are present in practically every country, yet, for various historical and political reasons generally relating to repression, segregation and discrimination, contact between these communities across Europe is often more limited than one might think. One reason for this is, of course, the confinement (until 1989) of the largest such communities within the former communist countries and, consequently, the deterioration in their living conditions. In some countries, the rise in open displays of discrimination and violence against Roma/Gypsies and the lack of experience in democracy and membership of associations meant that it was difficult to have access to the information and/or skills needed to develop and manage projects with European support.

On another level, the indifference (whether real or merely perceived) of the richest European countries towards the social and economic situation of Roma/Gypsies in central and east European countries, along with the treatment inflicted on Roma refugees from Romania or the former Yugoslavia (to name but two examples), has only served to strengthen the impression of many Roma/Gypsies that the European institutions are hostile, or at least indifferent, to Roma/Gypsy communities.

In that context, it was important that the course should encourage explanation, discussion, demystification and information, and that it should help participants to understand the aims of the European institutions, how they operate and the programmes through which they implement their policies. Ideally, this should have resulted in the participants' becoming better equipped to initiate their own projects or, at any rate, gaining a better understanding of the institutions and the differences between the European Union and the Council of Europe, as well as the policies of each of their member states.

For this group and this particular course, however, the European dimension was not limited to the European institutions. The essential conditions for European co-operation also include awareness of the similarities between Roma/Gypsy communities in terms of culture and history and, inevitably, the question of the Romanes language. The fact that Roma/Gypsies in eastern and western Europe have been kept apart, initially for political reasons but now for economic and other political

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reasons, has served to heighten the differences and divisions between Roma/Gypsy organisations. Hence the need to tackle and discuss these issues with the participants with the aim of overcoming prejudices and stereotypes regarding relations between various ethnic, national and linguistic groups, and the role of *gadjé* 1 working with Roma/Gypsies.

Awareness of the European dimension of Roma/Gypsy communities and their contribution to culture across Europe is therefore essential for the promotion of co-operation, solidarity and interaction among the various Roma/Gypsy groups across national borders, as well as being a prerequisite for ensuring that relations with non-Roma organisations are strengthened and are not characterised by complexes and prejudices.

If Roma/Gypsies are, as some claim, a "genuinely European people", the institutions and the social majority need to recognise this fact. However, it also needs to be understood and accepted by the Roma/Gypsies themselves, in their own way, so that they may assume full control over their own destiny and take part in the building of Europe, rather than perpetuating the idea that the history of their people is ultimately written by the *gadjé* and imbued with their prejudices.

The programme examined the European dimension in the following way:

a. Presentation of the Council of Europe, the European Union and the OSCE

Objectives

- To train participants in working with the various European institutions and their programmes;
- To clarify areas of confusion between the various institutions;
- To help participants understand the institutional framework of the course;
- To provide information about the main differences between the institutions and their programmes, and the way in which they can support Roma/Gypsy communities and their projects and organisations.

Content

- General information session on the differences between, and specific features of, the Council of Europe, the European Union and the OSCE (history, goals, institutions, policies and objectives regarding minorities in general and Roma in particular);
- Workshops on each of these institutions (to provide further information tailored to the participants' interests);
- Information on the Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights and Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and their importance in protecting the fundamental rights of Roma/Gypsies throughout Europe;

- Discussion with a representative of the Council of Europe's Directorate of Social and Economic Affairs (DASE) with responsibility for co-ordinating activities for Roma/Gypsies.

The alienation of Roma/Gypsy communities from the societies in which they live often causes them to be relatively uninterested in the institutions and sometimes even wary of their objectives. Information about these institutions and their programmes consequently needed to be adapted to the context and to the participants' concerns. At the same time, it was useful for the participants to find out how to use legal instruments and political machinery whenever they felt that their rights were being violated.

The sessions on this subject revealed that in spite of the efforts made at local level, information provided on the institutions was often inappropriate and sometimes even led to a degree of elitism within Roma/Gypsy communities, in that it was only helpful to central organisations. This sometimes led to the impression that the institutions were really too far removed from the everyday concerns of Roma/Gypsies and their communities (moreover, fundamental needs in terms of decent living conditions were felt to be more important than political measures).

The examples of support measures and activities carried out under the DASE programme for Roma/Gypsies nevertheless revealed that not all the problems encountered by Roma/Gypsy communities could be tackled purely through political and educational measures. Social and economic problems also required the European institutions and the Roma/Gypsies themselves to be able to devise and apply solutions based on interaction at local level between Roma/Gypsy groups and local authorities, for example, and to make use of the power and prestige of the European institutions to press for change on the part of national governments and local authorities.

b. Information on European youth programmes and Roma/Gypsy issues

Objectives

- To provide the participants with basic information about European programmes likely to be of interest to their projects and organisations;
- To inform the participants about the European institutions' policies and programmes concerning Roma/Gypsy communities in Europe (and the complementarity between these programmes and institutions) and hence to help them understand the policies, objectives, message and role of these institutions;
- To motivate the participants and encourage them to make use of the information on these programmes and to contact the appropriate institutions at European or national level.

Content

- Information session on Youth for Europe and European Voluntary Service programmes and their relevance to young Roma/Gypsies (opportunities for exchanges, training seminars, etc), and distribution of related documentation in several languages;
- Presentation of the Socrates/Comenius programme, in particular the arrangements concerning educational programmes for Roma/Gypsies and distance learning;
- Examples of projects carried out with Roma/Gypsies and other socially underprivileged groups under the Phare and Tacis LIEN programmes;
- Workshops on the work of the Youth Directorate and the possibilities it offers for youth organisations, in particular through training and language courses, training for young people from minorities, and support from the European Youth Foundation for projects initiated by youth organisations.

A number of participants expressed doubts as to whether they would really be able to receive support from most of these programmes. There were two reasons for this: firstly, they thought that it would be difficult to gather funds to supplement the grants awarded at European level, and, secondly, they thought that some of the people working on these programmes were corrupt or simply hostile to Roma/Gypsy projects, as had been witnessed in certain countries.

Others, however, saw that the existing possibilities provided a potential means of training youth leaders to take on responsibilities within their own communities and in Europe at large, since it was vital for youth leaders to be able to communicate (with the institutions, other Roma/Gypsy organisations, etc).

c. Agenda 2000 – Periodic reports on human rights in European Union applicant countries

Objectives

- To complement the earlier information on the European Union, its objectives and its institutions;
- To raise participants' awareness of the role of the European Union in promoting pluralistic democracy and protecting human rights;
- To alert participants to the potential role of their organisations in supporting their country's integration process and, if appropriate, adding to the information on respect for human rights supplied to the European Union by the national authorities;
- To analyse the concept of civil society and the role of Roma/Gypsy associations in promoting democratic and civic participation within their societies.

Content

- Presentation of the context of Agenda 2000 national reports;
- Analysis of reports for the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, with reference to human rights and, in particular, the attention devoted to the situation of Roma/Gypsy communities in these countries;
- Working groups on the role of Roma/Gypsy youth leaders in developing civil society and strengthening democracy.

In some cases the work carried out with the participants highlighted their relative unease, since most of them were unaware of the existence of these reports, the process for compiling them and the ways in which their youth organisations could influence or contribute to them. This work also made the participants more aware of some of the issues facing Roma/Gypsies, and, in this context, helped the participants and instructors to demystify the role of the European institutions and to realise that these institutions were more concerned with Roma/Gypsy problems than they might have thought.

d. Roma/Gypsy culture, language and history

Objectives

- To raise participants' awareness of their common cultural roots;
- To understand the complexity, diversity and wealth of Roma/Gypsy culture and communities across Europe;
- To question ethnocentric attitudes and encourage consideration of multiple layers of identity;
- To invite participants to think about their own cultural roots and identity and their interconnection with European and national elements;
- To encourage communication, exchange and empathy between participants.

Content

- Introductory statement by Prof. Marcel Courthiade (linguist – among those attempting to standardise the Romani language – and Vice-President of the International Romani Union) on the origins and presence of Roma/Gypsies in Europe. In his contribution, he also warned the participants against taking a romantic or extremist view of Roma/Gypsy history: Roma/Gypsy communities were very different and had been strongly influenced by the societies of the countries in which they lived;
- Working groups on the role of youth leaders in promoting and teaching Roma/Gypsy history, language and culture. In small groups, the participants discussed their perceptions of Roma/Gypsy history and the aspects which each community perceived as fundamental to its history and culture.

The theme aroused great interest among the participants, particularly because of the divergent points of view on the role of the Romanes

language in the definition of "Roma/ Gypsy culture". At the participants' request, the theme was discussed further at another session in groups. This highlighted the importance of the issue as a means of broadening participants' perceptions of Roma/Gypsies. The European dimension can play a vital role here both in promoting a common, open-ended identity and in highlighting the need to encourage exchanges between young people in order to go beyond romantic, overly "ethnicised" visions of "Roma/ Gypsy culture".

e. European Roma/Gypsy youth organisations

Objectives

- To discuss the organisational arrangements for young Roma/Gypsies across Europe;
- To inform participants about initiatives to set up European Roma/Gypsy youth organisations or networks;
- To analyse ways of encouraging co-operation and solidarity between young Roma/Gypsies throughout Europe as a means of promoting the participation and representation at European level of national and local organisations.

Content

- Round table with representatives
    - *of the Forum of European Roma Young People (FERYP)* (Mr Emiliae Niculae)
    - **of EUROTERNNET** (Mr Juan Silva)
    - **of the Roma National Congress – Youth section** (Mr Marko Knudsen);
- Working groups on the role of European networks and ways in which they should, or could, encourage young Roma/Gypsies to form organisations at national level.

The discussions aroused strong emotions at times because the different networks represented different points of view and attitudes regarding forms of co-operation and organisation. The participants were aware of the fact that the three initiatives/networks mentioned above had been promoted or launched since the summit, often with the direct support and involvement of the European institutions (the European Union and the Council of Europe). The first European Congress of Roma/Gypsy Youth (Barcelona 1997) was discussed and was heavily criticised with regard to its organisation and the manner in which its conclusions were reached and presented.

The fact is that most participants did not see themselves as belonging to these networks, especially as they had expected to be informed of the

results of the networks' activities and felt that little had been achieved in the way of tangible results. There was also a general feeling that too much was expected of these networks of young people, whereas they had to contend with problems relating to funding, communication, training and independence from other Roma/Gypsy adult movements. Nevertheless, it was agreed that the pluralism of Roma/Gypsy organisations should be respected and the European institutions were consequently reproached for demanding a single, "unified" Roma/Gypsy youth organisation, an approach which was perceived as reflecting a paternalistic, prejudiced attitude that failed to take account of the real-life situation in Roma/Gypsy communities.

The participants and speakers appreciated the opportunity which the course gave them to engage in dialogue and thus to avoid any antagonisms and rivalries that might have led to divisions. Although the three speakers demonstrated a genuine desire for mutual co-operation and support, it was clear that the three organisations had their own individual features with regard to origin, structure, priorities and membership. Accordingly, they should first of all be allowed to develop and consolidate their own identities, activities and membership before becoming involved in a closer form of co-operation.

Footnotes

1 Term used by Roma/Gypsies to designate non-Roma/Gypsies ("gadjo" in the singular for a man, "gadji" for a woman). **Back to text**

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Intercultural Implications

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Introduction

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Roma culture forms part of a set of values which includes great respect for one's elders, a special way of viewing family relationships, a particular concept of the passage of time and a different way of understanding harmony between the world and the emotions…

(Extract from the report of the course in 1995)

"… Men and women are not only themselves; they are also the region in which they were born, the city apartment or the farm in which they learnt to walk, the games they played as children, the tales they overheard, the food they ate, the schools they attended, the sports they followed, the poets they read and the God they believed in."

(W. Somerset Maugham, "The Razor's Edge")

The intercultural dimension in a course of this kind is present on two levels:

- relations between Roma/Gypsy culture and majority culture;
- awareness of the fact that Roma/Gypsy culture is not homogeneous but pluralistic and that there are now many variants of it, depending on the different historical, social and political contexts.

Assuming that the aims of intercultural learning are to provide training for young people in tolerance, peaceful coexistence and co-operation with those who are different, and to enable them to discover the origins and mechanisms of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance, and that it is based on a process of self-discovery, we felt that it was important that the course should give (future) Roma/Gypsy youth leaders the opportunity to explore different aspects of culture and minority/majority relations so as to avoid the pitfall of retreating into a fixed identity.

The objectives of the intercultural learning process for the course participants were:

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- To learn to view themselves from the outside;
- To understand the world in which they lived;
- To become familiar with other environments;
- To view difference in a positive light, as a source of enrichment;
- To cultivate positive attitudes, values and types of behaviour.

The Patchwork of Roma Culture –
Exploring a World of Diversity

by Demetrio Gomez-Avila

[This text by Demetrio GOMEZ AVILA was written for the first issue (issue 0 - July 1999) of « Coyote », the new publication addressed to youth Trainers working at European level.]

Before I started attending the courses and international meetings arranged at the European Youth Centres, the world I knew, that of the gypsies, was very limited.

In Spain, there has never been very much contact with Roma from other areas. Contact with Roma from former Yugoslavia, Romania, and so on was restricted to hearsay, and some Spanish Kale always said that they were not real Roma. There has, however, been limited contact with Sinti (French Roma, some of whom live in caravans: they are also known as Manouches). People in Spain have never truly been aware of the evil inflicted by the nazi holocaust on the Roma population, and there is no real political awareness of the idea of respect. The Romani language was banned for centuries and has thus been reduced to a vocabulary of about a hundred words, intermingled with Castilian, so that it can no longer, strictly speaking, be regarded as a separate dialect.

Despite their lack of reference points, the Kale have stuck together; they proudly defend their status as a separate people and have retained the key elements of their identity: a family, social and economic structure which has helped them to survive while preserving the traditions and customs that mark them out clearly from the majority, reinforce their attachment to a very particular feeling, way and concept of living, and make them the equals of their Roma brothers.

This isolation has meant that we have lost sight of the extraordinary diversity of the patchwork of Roma culture. It is surprising to see how the same spirit can give rise to so many different perfumes which only serve to enhance the delicacy and splendour of something very special, as a culture can be.

The first time I was able to immerse myself in that something very special was in 1996, when I attended my first meeting with Roma from

other countries. At first, I was very keen to get to know these other Roma, who, although I was one of their kind, seemed so different. Once I had met with them, however, I felt somewhat disconcerted. I must admit that it was not easy to break through the barrier. Until then, it had been so easy for me to say what it meant to be a Rom! Now, I found myself challenging many of the statements and beliefs I had held to be absolute from an early stage in my childhood.

Little by little, as we slowly began to overcome our initial fears, we became aware of something amazing, something we could not explain but which was gradually taking us over. There was a kind of synchronisation, a kind of harmony which made us feel as though we were becoming part of a vast world which we were beginning to appreciate beyond our little differences. The feeling of brotherhood, sharing, joy and laughter at certain situations, understanding the world and human relationships… something very deep was helping us to see, to discover more clearly and closely the imperceptible yet solid link that made us all equal as individuals within our particular group.

This discovery, this feeling of growing and learning about something you have been denied, was so great that I felt the impulse to learn more and to take part in other activities: I now have a more comprehensive knowledge and a fighting spirit which, in a sense, drives me to carry on working towards a goal which I believe in. Being now a youth leader myself, I have been fortunate enough to have been part of a team of trainers at a variety of training courses for young Roma. I only hope that the other young Roma with whom I am working will be able to enjoy and experience the same feeling that I experienced myself.

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Intercultural implications

Within the group

The East-West "divide"

The various Roma/Gypsy ethnic groups and communities still have much to learn from one another if they are to gain a better mutual understanding. If any two Roma/Gypsies meet, they will have certain things in common but they will also realise that there are many differences between them. Some are aware that they have lost some of their traditions, do not know the origins of their culture or have lost skills for which they were renowned not so long ago; others who live far apart can see similarities in their musical and artistic styles and their traditions; others may discover the origins of a custom by meeting members of the same ethnic group living elsewhere, sometimes a very long way away. Nowadays Roma/Gypsies themselves, and increasingly the younger ones, are keen to find out about their history, the development of their culture(s) and community(ies), and their current situation.

At the various meetings and training courses organised by the Council of Europe Youth Directorate for young Roma/Gypsies, participants from a range of countries have often expressed a strong desire to preserve their culture, to know more about it and to make it more widely known, and to gain a better understanding of their roots and their transnational dimension. At the same time, these courses have highlighted the gradual development of a "divide" between central and eastern Europe and western Europe.

In the past, the development of associations was strongly encouraged and supported in western Europe; subsequent political changes in central and eastern Europe led to an awareness of the realities of the situation in that region and substantial support for the development of associations and the protection of human rights. Such efforts are worthy of praise but, for one thing, the problems in the west have not necessarily been solved yet and, for another, it has been observed that communities from these two regions are sometimes unable to recognise their common origins: young people from eastern Europe, whose families have lived a sedentary existence for several generations, often find it incomprehensible that certain communities from the west are still itinerant; some people find it hard to accept that their "brothers and sisters" do not speak Romani, whereas the reason for this may be related to a repressive historical background; while music is a good example of the cultural diversity of the Roma/Gypsy people, it is sometimes a source of heated debate as to what constitutes "real" Roma/Gypsy music. These are but a few

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examples of the divide which is gradually building up and which could hinder the process of interchange and discovery, at a time when various national and international programmes are encouraging active participation, conflict prevention and intercultural learning.

In France, the Gypsies are treated as citizens in their own right and, as such, are able to benefit from a social welfare system that is relatively advantageous for most of them. However, their low level of representation means that they often experience rejection and marginalisation. A paradoxical situation therefore develops in which young Manouches 1 living in a developed country such as France begin to envy the capacity for action and political activism enjoyed by their central and east European "brothers and sisters", even though the civil rights and emancipation movements have already existed for a number of years in the west.

Mutual prejudices – minority/majority relations

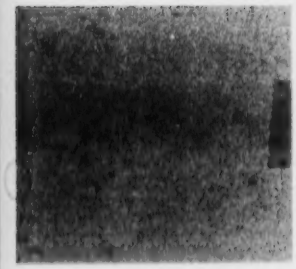
If a centuries-old image of Roma/Gypsies is to be changed and relations founded on trust, tolerance and greater mutual understanding are to be established between the Roma/Gypsy community and the *gadjé*, a fundamental requirement as the twenty-first century approaches is to combat *gadjé* prejudices against Roma/Gypsies and vice versa:

- "Non-Roma" generally know very little about Roma/Gypsy culture. This ignorance leads to deep-rooted prejudices which affect the daily lives of Roma/Gypsies wherever they live.
- For their part, Roma/Gypsies also have numerous prejudices against *gadjé*, who represent the majority culture to which they have no access and in which they are unable to find a place for themselves.

Relations between minority and majority culture are characterised by suspicion, mutual ignorance and prejudice. If young Roma/Gypsies are to be given a genuine role in civil society, they need to be helped to overcome their mistrust of the majority, to overcome their prejudices, to explore their own cultural identity and to find out more about aspects of majority culture so that they can build a bridge between minority and majority culture.

It therefore seems important to pursue action in a number of areas:

- Improving knowledge of Roma/Gypsy culture in general (its origins, history and development) and its current situation, values and codes;
- Improving knowledge of different ethnic groups and their specific features, origins, history and development;
- Encouraging intercultural learning among the various ethnic groups from different European regions and among Roma and *gadjé*.



Footnotes

1 Gypsy community living mostly in France. **Back to text**

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Intercultural implications

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The two specifically intercultural events on the programme

1. Intercultural learning day – exercise and reactions of participants, follow-up

Objectives

- To introduce the basic notions of culture and cultural identity;
- To analyse the conflicts which arise when two different cultures come into contact with each other;
- To try to find ways of settling intercultural conflicts;
- To examine the importance of intercultural learning as a way of settling conflicts.

Content

"Kerdos", an exercise in group dynamics:

This exercise brings together two different cultures with the same objective: the inhabitants of the community of Kerdia, who possess the materials to build a bridge, and engineers from another community who use their expertise to build the bridge and to teach the inhabitants of Kerdia to build the bridge themselves, thus improving conditions in the village. The exercise stimulates discussion of the different approaches and viewpoints which people may have in relation to the same problem and the solutions to it, and of fundamental questions relating to majority/minority relations, stereotypes and prejudices and possible solutions to conflicts.

Some of the participants found it difficult to get into the role which they were assigned in the simulation exercise. This methodology was a new approach for the participants, who initially had a certain amount of trouble understanding the dynamics of the exercise. However, they appreciated the exercise and managed to achieve its objectives. The exercise also gave them the chance to take a critical look at their own role in the community and the potential role of *gadjé* professionals working in a Roma/Gypsy community.

This provided an opportunity for discussion of the prejudices of

Roma/Gypsies against *gadjé* and vice versa, and the impact of these prejudices on organisations, their internal structure and their relations with the majority culture.

2. Workshop on intercultural learning

Objectives

- To continue discussions on intercultural learning in general;
- To consider differences and similarities between countries and between ethnic groups.

Content

- Exchange of views on differences and similarities in rituals and events celebrated;
- Discussion on themes considered taboo within the community;
- Discussion on personal relations between Roma/Gypsies from different ethnic groups and between Roma/Gypsies and *gadjé* (couples, mixed marriages, majority/minority relations, etc).

The workshop gave rise to some extremely interesting discussions in which the participants felt at ease and started to discuss different aspects of their culture. They were initially asked to think about how they would greet their friends, relatives and *gadjé* friends, but the discussion gradually turned to the traditions connected with major events in life (engagements, marriages, funerals, etc). In the second part of the workshop, the participants spoke, of their own free will, about subjects that were strictly taboo in their community, although some participants admitted that they found it hard to address these subjects.

Other parts of the course with a significant emphasis on the intercultural dimension

1. Discussions on Roma/Gypsy history, culture and identity

(This point has already been dealt with from a different perspective in the section on the European dimension).

Objectives

- To find out (more) about aspects of Roma/Gypsy culture and to consider the importance of appropriating one's own cultural history;
- To disseminate knowledge about the history of the Roma/Gypsy people within one's own organisation or community and among *gadjé*.

Content

- Basic aspects of Roma/Gypsy history were outlined. This section

was very popular and was greatly appreciated by the participants; this illustrates their need to know and appropriate the history of their people;
- Stereotypes and prejudices regarding Roma culture;
- Internalisation/externalisation of culture - "how I see my culture, how others see my culture": in groups, the participants were asked to think about how they could help spread knowledge about Roma/Gypsy culture within their own community or among *gadjé*. The discussion clearly showed that if they did not know about their culture, the participants' vision of it drew on the stereotyped images which *gadjé* might have of Roma/Gypsies, ie. a "folk" image of a culture of dance, song and celebration.

This discussion enabled participants to draw a distinction between different levels of culture (important and superficial aspects) and to become aware of the need to know more about their own cultural identity.

It is especially important for youth leaders to know and understand these mechanisms in order to avoid the danger of retreating into a fixed identity.

2. Visits to see local projects and organisations working in the field

Objectives

- To allow participants to see work carried out at local level, to exchange ideas in the light of their own experiences and to gain new ideas;
- To meet local people dealing with the complex issues concerning Roma/Gypsies;
- To make participants aware of the range of different ethnic groups present in Strasbourg;
- To give participants the opportunity to leave the course venue and go out into the field to see the actual situation of Roma/Gypsies living in Strasbourg.

Content

- Introduction by Dominique Steinberger, director of Arpomt (a local association), to the situation of nomadic populations in Strasbourg and elsewhere in Alsace, the historical background to their arrival in the region, French laws governing nomadic populations, different ways of life (sedentary, semi-nomadic, nomadic) and ethnic groups;

- Visits in small groups to various projects:
    - **APPONA**, *Association pour la promotion des populations nomades en Alsace* (Association for the Promotion of Nomadic Populations in Alsace): meetings with the director, the cultural mediator (Engé Helmstetter, a course

participant), a social mediator, the head of the "small children and women's literacy" section, and the chair of the craft co-operative; explanation of the association's different fields of action, the approach it followed and its experiences;

- **ARPOMT**, *Association pour la recherche pédagogique ouverte en milieu tsigane* (Association for Open Educational Research in Gypsy Circles): visit with Dominique Steinberger (director) to a number of sites and discussion with the inhabitants of these sites and social workers, such as teachers from the mobile school; visit to the association's headquarters and meeting with the teacher in charge of educational assistance for children taking distance-learning courses;
- **SOS Aide aux habitants**: local association working with social mediators (including Pisla Chagaar, a course participant) from different cultural backgrounds, offering legal and administrative help to local inhabitants, mediation in criminal cases, assistance to victims of crime, and access to means of exercising rights.

After the visits, the participants were divided into small mixed groups to discuss their impressions of the various places visited and to consider what they would like to show a group of visitors to their town.

The discussions focused on:

- The role of education for nomadic and semi-nomadic children;
- The role of mediators in a Roma/Gypsy environment;
- The role of professionals working within the community;
- The impact of national and local policies on the lives of Roma/Gypsies;
- How to conduct projects in a Roma/Gypsy environment with Roma/Gypsies and *gadjé* social workers and organisations;
- Nomadic and semi-nomadic ways of life.

During these visits and the subsequent discussions, the participants were able to see the various social situations of the Roma/Gypsy population in Strasbourg. For many of the participants, it was a revelation to see that a large number of French Gypsies opted for a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle and that the everyday living conditions were difficult at French Roma/Gypsy sites too. The discussions also gave participants the chance to share their practical experiences and points of view, and to consider whether any particular approaches would work in their own environment. The meeting with different ethnic groups living in Strasbourg showed the participants a far more diverse situation than they could possibly have imagined, and a way of life which participants from central and eastern Europe often found hard to understand and accept. This led to discussions on the role of nomadism in Roma/Gypsy culture, based on the examples that had been witnessed in Strasbourg. Here, the communities had not been forced into a sedentary existence, or at any rate not in a radical, authoritarian manner as in other countries. France

had passed a number of laws governing sites, reception and education; however, the attitude of the authorities could also give rise to situations leading to exclusion.

Informal and festive occasions during the course

A course of this nature provides numerous occasions, during meals, evenings and free time, when participants are able to meet informally to continue some of their discussions and enjoy more detailed conversations about their own environment and differences between countries or ethnic groups. These are also occasions for festivities, where all participants can express themselves differently through music and dance, sometimes discovering that common origins can also lead to great diversity.

Events were also organised to allow the discovery of other environments:

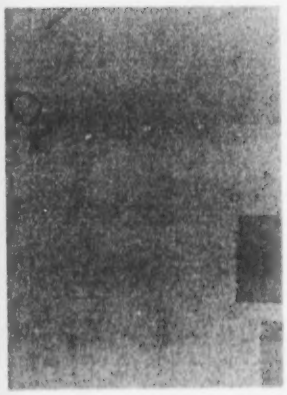
- A dinner in Barr, at the home of Pisla, the grandmother of one of the French participants (Engé Helmstetter). The dinner and party were prepared by the whole family. The evening gave the participants the chance to meet people who had been settled in Alsace for a number of years, and to hold a party, an important occasion for meeting people in Roma culture. The event also provided an opportunity for communication in different Romani dialects, while the grandmother was able to get back in touch with her lost origins (central and Eastern Europe);

- A Gypsy music group (who had also performed at the above party), the French participant's family, leaders of the associations to which visits had taken place, and young people living at the sites all attended a big party at the end of the course;

- The participants were able to see a film made by Engé Helmstetter and his family, *De la source à la mer* (From the source to the sea), which appealed to people's common sense to encourage environmental protection. The film also dealt with the second world war, which had a direct impact on Roma/Gypsies, and illustrated the route from Alsace to Saintes Maries de la Mer, an important place of pilgrimage for Catholic Roma.

The course was notable for the degree of interaction between the participants and the training team. Although there were a number of linguistic difficulties, communication and dynamics within the group were good.

One area of conflict which should be mentioned, however, was the clash of identities concerning the use of the terms "FYROM" ("the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia") and "Macedonia". For the sake of simplicity in everyday speech, the participants and instructors referred to "Macedonia" rather than using the official denomination "FYROM". The situation was aggravated by the provocations of the participants from "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and culminated in a



dispute between the participants from Greece and those from "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".

This may seem illogical, coming from a people claiming not to have any territorial allegiance, but it provides a clear illustration of the clashes of identity among Roma/Gypsies, who are torn between their national allegiance and their cultural identity.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, the course received a very positive assessment from the participants and the instructors. It furthered personal and vocational development and had an impact at local, international and global level: the development of projects of great social value in association with the community, networking and exchanges between participants, increased awareness of the cultural and intercultural dimension in majority/minority relations and within the Roma/Gypsy community, knowledge of the European institutions and their relevant programmes, knowledge of Roma/Gypsy associations at national, international and local level, etc.

In more general terms, the course marked the end of a training cycle which began as part of the Youth Campaign against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Intolerance, and which was aimed at developing Roma/Gypsy youth associations at European and local level.

After four years of an exercise with an unpredictable outcome, a number of positive developments may be observed, although the results are still far from certain:

- It is now possible, and beneficial, to work with young Roma/Gypsies at European level (this was not easy at the outset): the results obtained since 1995 in terms of interaction between associations are positive (three Roma/Gypsy youth networks/forums have been set up at international level) and ***encourage involvement in associations at local, national and international level.***

- Young people are now more willing to carry out projects within their community. Often these projects are of great importance in the development and improvement of living conditions at local level, but in spite of all this, there is still a ***considerable need for training.***

- Local and international Roma associations are starting to become aware of ***the need to co-operate*** with one another and with *gadjé* organisations. However, the practical arrangements and strategies for such co-operation still have to be worked out.

- Despite the developments that have taken place in the past few years, ***Roma/Gypsy associations remain relatively isolated***:

    - traditionally, young Roma/Gypsies have only a limited role

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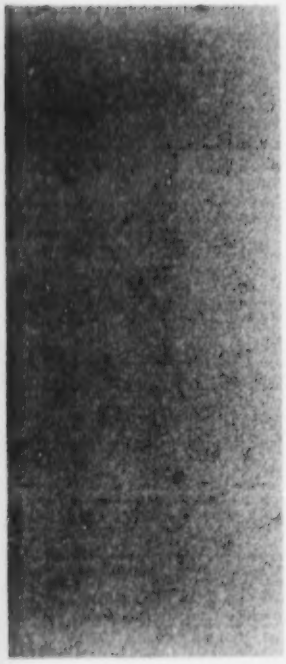

within the community (in Roma/Gypsy society) and have to yield to the authority of their "elders";
    - generally speaking, Roma/Gypsies have little access to information and their participation at European level remains hypothetical.
- The few Roma/Gypsies who have been able to attend training courses (set up) since 1995 form a network that is still very fragile and cannot yet provide for, and respond to, all the needs of the community.

The networks of young Roma/Gypsies that are beginning to form at local, national and international level still require a good deal of assistance and encouragement if they are to foster involvement in associations, eradicate isolation and social discrimination and aspire to political representation. Only by developing strategies for co-operation between institutions, between Roma/Gypsy associations and between Roma/Gypsies and *gadjé* will young Roma/Gypsies be able to create outlets for expressing their cultural identity and forge links between their cultural identity and majority culture.

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The group in Strasbourg

Photo . Orhan DEMIROVSKI

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Participants' comments

"I shall be starting my studies at the University of Oriental Languages in Paris in September 1999.

I work for the Lom Roma Foundation as co-ordinator of the education section. I am in permanent contact with children, their parents and their teachers. Every week, I visit the suburbs and schools (primary schools, two secondary schools and three technical schools). In relation to the national average, the children supervised by the foundation have a good standard. I would like the children to have a better education. I would also like to develop training for women who make clothes.

In my opinion, the main reason the situation today is not good is the country's poor economic situation. I think that the young children of today will have a brighter future and better educational opportunities.

I think that a course like this helps you acquire experience and discuss different practices. Participants gain a better understanding of what the institutions are and what their role is. The information on human rights and their protection is very important. The course also helps you to think about your own work and projects and their different phases, and how to work more effectively."

Diana Kirilova, 23 years old, Lom, Bulgaria.

"I work as a social mediator for the association 'SOS Aide aux habitants', which provides mediation in criminal cases and advice on access to rights. I also belong to a youth association at the site where I live. I would like to be more involved in an institution to have a greater say, to tell people about the real-life situation and to bring about change. I would like to encourage the majority of Gypsies to play a more active, responsible role on the ground.

I think that, in future, some customs will unfortunately die out, but I hope that there will be greater confidence and trust in society."

Pisla Chagaar, 29 years old, Strasbourg, France

"I co-ordinate Roma issues within the 'Common Fate' organisation, which aims to integrate all kinds of minorities into society.

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I think that the way to resolve the current situation of Roma is through education. I would expect the European institutions to provide more expert assistance and moral support."

Anita Ola'h, 21 years old, Budapest, Hungary.

"I am a member of the Pan-Hellenic Cultural Association of Greek Roma. I am also a television producer and produce documentaries, TV series and advertisements.

I think that the situation today depends a great deal on the environment in which communities live. When it is a question of survival, people do not look to see who is helping them to survive. Until now, Roma have managed to survive a succession of ordeals while still preserving their traditions. Nowadays, the solutions put forward do not come from Roma themselves but from specialists. Things must be seen in their overall context, and the environment must help to foster democracy."

Kostas Kostoulopoulos, **34 years old, Athens, Greece.**

"I work for the Roma Democratic Union organisation as human rights education co-ordinator.

The organisation sets out to teach Roma about human rights so that they can fight against discrimination.

I think that in order to make any changes, Roma need to change their attitudes towards education. I would expect the European institutions to devote more attention to Roma rights."

David Pesta, 20 years old, Ostrava, Czech Republic.

"I am a second-year student training to be a social worker. I work for the Roma students' organisation, which promotes better education for young Roma, a change in attitudes towards education, and child literacy. I co-ordinate education programmes. After my studies, I would like to work for my community, which suffers too much discrimination and marginalisation in Romania. I hope to be able to motivate other Roma to play an active role within the community and to encourage other Roma to have an education. I hope that Roma who have received an education will then change the attitudes of their community. I would expect the European institutions to arrange more training courses, provide more financial support for educational projects and organise more activities."

Margareta Matache, 21 years old,Bucharest, Romania.

"I am in charge of the Roma Sunday school, run by the Roma organisation in Izmail. The school helps about thirty children of between

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6 and 15 years of age to acquire basic reading and writing skills and to become integrated into society. It offers Russian, Ukrainian, Romani and English language classes and classes in Roma culture, and puts on shows for festivals. The organisation helps Roma to find work and to settle their conflicts with the police, and offers general assistance with social problems. It also distributes food, clothing and books with the support of the Soros Foundation.

I would like to set up an information centre with educational and cultural activities for Roma. I live in a region where there are a lot of problems, particularly regarding employment and education. More people are needed to manage projects, but there are not enough people with a sufficient level of education. I would expect the European institutions to be more co-operative and ready to listen."

Zola Kondur, 22 years old, Izmail, Ukraine.

"I am a member of Filoxenia. I teach Romani at university.

I would like to set up a nursery school for Roma children and make it easier for children to go to secondary school and university."

Vera Hhouseaglou, 20 years old, Thessaloniki, Greece

"I am finishing my studies at the College of Public Administration and working as an assistant at the Open Society (Soros) Institute on the Roma Participation Programme.

In my opinion, the situation in Hungary is different depending on whether you are in the west or the east of the country. In the east, life is difficult for both Hungarians and Roma. In my home town, I don't think there are any major problems between Roma and gadjé; there is enough room for everyone. The forthcoming elections should provide an opportunity to act because Roma will be able to stand for Parliament."

Istvan Forgacs, 23 years old, Budapest, Hungary.

"I work as a human rights instructor and dance teacher for the Roma association in Izmail

I hope that the organisation's work will play a part in breaking down stereotypical images of Roma. I think that the European institutions should devote more attention to the situation of Roma."

Lina Kondur, 24 years old, Izmail, Ukraine

"I work for the National Employment Foundation as a programme manager. I think that Roma need help from outside if they are to be integrated into society.

I would expect the European institutions to put pressure on European governments to change the situation of Roma.

The Roma question should be regarded as one of the most important issues in European integration."

Jozsef Kolompar, 29 years old, Budapest, Hungary.

"I work as a co-ordinator of Roma cultural activities for the Soros Foundation in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". The organisation's aims are to educate young Roma and to preserve their identity.

If the situation of Roma is in black and white today, it will be in colour tomorrow. I would like to set up a cultural centre."

Martin Demirovski, 23 years old,Skopje, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".

"I work for the 'Rromani Baxt' association, which provides education and information for Roma. My plans are to set up a large nursery for Roma children and an education centre for young adults over 24.

I would expect the European institutions to have more contact with Roma organisations and to provide support in terms of training and funding."

Jonuz Duka, 30 years old, Tirana, Albania

"I work as a cultural mediator for APPONA, an association based in Strasbourg which aims to promote the interests of nomadic populations in Alsace. My work involves promoting the wealth of Gypsy culture throughout the region. I am also a member of De la source à la mer, a small cultural association which seeks to promote culture through the audiovisual media.

I think that culture needs to get away from its folk or elitist image. I would like people to see culture as a whole rather than gathering up "crumbs" of it without doing anything substantial. Gypsies have always managed to adapt by making compromises to live side by side with other cultures.

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In the community there are different social classes, from the rich to those living in extreme poverty. I would expect the institutions to be sincere in the programmes they are setting up and not just to be doing it for the sake of it. A course like this one, which helps you with your work on organising projects, gives you a more mature attitude so that you realise that the money you need doesn't grow on trees."

Engé Helmstetter, 23 years old, Sparsbach, France.

"I work for the 'United Roma Committee' as a programme co-ordinator. My organisation aims to improve the situation of Roma by providing them with information about job opportunities.

I think that the situation is difficult today because Roma are oppressed by the majority but I hope that there will be progress in future. The institutions should arrange more training courses and co-operate more with Roma."

Emil Atanassov, 24 years old, Haskovo, Bulgaria.

"I work as a volunteer at 'Rromani Baxt', where I teach the children French and take photos with them. When I finish school, I hope to be able to continue studying. I would like to stage a photography exhibition on how I see Roma, because what you normally see is full of stereotypes.

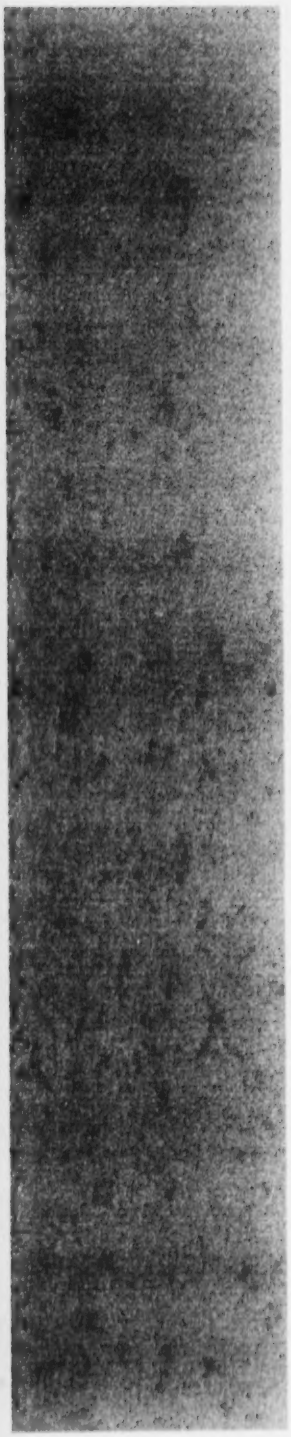
At the moment, I think that my community is having a lot of problems with education because there are too many children who don't go to school for financial reasons. I think that access to school will always be more difficult for Roma than for other people.

I would like the European institutions to make more field visits to find out the facts and realise what is really going on. A course like this is important for learning and discussing things with others."

Ervis Furtuna, 18 years old, Tirana, Albania.

"I'm the Chair of the Lom Roma Foundation. The organisation works with 5 employees and 30 volunteers.

Lom is a town with a high unemployment rate which is even worse among Roma: out of the town's 30 000 inhabitants, over 10 000 are Roma, 90% of whom are unemployed. The organisation works in the town's four main Roma suburbs, and stresses the importance of working not only with Roma but with all members of the population living in difficult social circumstances. Every day, over 1 000 children benefit



from the organisation's activities.

The activities are:

- Trying to prepare children for school by giving them Bulgarian language lessons. The organisation also promotes the idea that primary schools should have teachers and assistants from the Roma community who speak Romani. That would help children in their first few years by building up their confidence and allowing them to understand things in Romani which they would not have understood in Bulgarian;
- Providing food, clothes, shoes and books for schools;
- Organising sports activities, music lessons, and lessons in Roma and Bulgarian folk dancing;
- Offering language classes (in Bulgarian, Romani, English, German and French) and classes in information technology.

To get this far with the organisation, I initially had to spend a lot of time learning from the experience (and hence the problems, failures and good practices) of other organisations in my country.

In Bulgaria, I work at various levels: in the town of Lom, I act as an adviser on minority affairs to the municipal council; at regional level, I advise the authorities on issues relating to Roma; at national level, I am a member of the national committee on Roma of the National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues.

My wish is to be able to train young Roma to be mediators in different suburbs. I would like to be able to provide more examples of good practice so that the government can understand the need to change the education system. I hope that my organisation's work will allow Roma and gadjé to become more open towards one another and to work together.

I believe that in this day and age, Roma too need to adapt to the realities of society in order to improve their knowledge and skills. At the same time, the community should promote its rich culture so as not to lose its identity.

The European institutions should build more bridges and act as mediators between NGOs and governments to encourage more effective dialogue."

Nikolay Kirilov, 30 years old, Lom, Bulgaria

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Roma/gypsy internet sites

- **Artemis** (Gypsy and Traveller education) http://www.jokak.demon.co.uk/artemis/homepage.html
- **Association of Gypsies/Romani International** http://198.62.75.1/www2/gypsies.net/
- **Cyberforum of the Social Sciences**: welcome to "akate si roma"
- **European Roma Rights Center** http://errc/org/
- **Gypsies: Tramps and Thieves?** (article)
  http://www/columbia.edu/cu/sipa/PUBS/SLANT/SPRING/gypsies.html
- **Gypsy collections at the University of Liverpool**
  http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/gypsy/intro.htm
- **Gypsy Lore collection**
  http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/gypsy.intro2.htm
- **Gypsy Traveller Health Information Service (UK)**
  http://www/gthis.org/
- **Handbook of Vlax Romani**
  http://www.slavica.com/recent/rb09.htm
- **HCA Roma Section**
  http://www.czechia.com/hcaroma/
- **Interface collection of books on Gypsies and Travellers**
  http://www.herts.ac.uk/UHPress/interface.html
- **International Renaissance Foundation** see: Open World #2 August-October 1998
  http://www.irf.kiev.ua/eng/eng_new/openw/index.html
- **Legal Defense of the Roma (Gypsies) in Central and Eastern Europe**
  see also **Legal defence for Gypsies (Hungary)**
  http://pili.law.columbia.edu/publicactions/roma/luncheon.html
- **Links to other Gypsy related sites** (from the University of Liverpool's Gypsy collections site)
  http://sca.lib/liv/ac/uk/collections/gypsy/links.htm
- **Marginalisation of gypsies**
  http://webjcli.ncl.ac.uk/articles3/onions3.html
- **Memorial book: The Gypsies at Auschwitz-Birkenau**
  http://www/saur/de/jewish/jel1162.htm
- **Minderheiten**
  http://www.dfg-vk.de/links/book361.htm
- **Open Society Institute: Roma Participation Program**
  http://www.osi/hu/roma/

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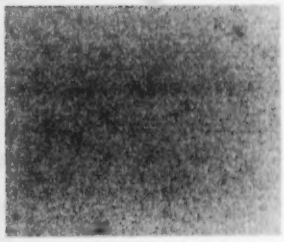
- **Other Gypsy collections** (from the University of Liverpool's Gypsy collections site)
  http://sca.lib.liv/ac.uk/collections/gypsy/othercol.htm
- **Pavee Point Travellers' Centre**
  http://ireland.iol.ie/~pavee/index.htm
- **Review: Etudes Tsiganes**
  hppt://perso.magic.fr.lapeniche/tsiganes/anglais/revuefr.html
- **Research Institute of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: Reference Information Paper 3: Roma (Gypsies)**
- **Roma and forced migration: an annotated bibliography**
  http://www.soros.org/fmp2/html/roma2.htm
- **Roma (Gypsies) and the holocaust**
  http://www.igc.apc.org/iearn/hgp/aeti/aeti-1997/roma-in-holocaust.html
- **Roma, still knocking on Europe's closed doors**
  http://www.ijt.cz/transitions/archsep6.html
- **Romani café**
  http://www.cruzio.com/~stevem/gipsy.html
- **Romani-English Glossary**
  http://www2.arnes.si/~eusmith/Romany/glossary.html
- **Romani group meet**
  http://shop.logos.it/language_today/archive/old_document/romani.html
- **Romani.org Home page**
  http://www.romani.org/
- **Romnews Network Online**
  http://romnews.com/CAN.html
- **Statement of the HCNM on his study of the Roma in the CSCE region, Meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), Prague, 21-23 September 1993 [see "Speeches"]**
  http://osceprag.cz/inst/hcnm/
- **Union romani**
  http://www.unionromani.org/unioning.htm#publi
- **WESS Web: Roma/Romani/Gypsies**
  http://gort.ucsd.edu/sdunlap/ssh-rom.html

Council of Europe

- **Council of Europe home page**
  http://www.coe.fr/
  - **European Youth Centre, Budapest**
    http://www.eycb.hu/index/shtml
  - **European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)**
    http://www.ecri.coe.int/
  - **Youth Directorate home page** http://www.coe.fr/youth
    - ***Coyote*** a new magazine on issues around youth-training-Europe for trainers and youth workers

Under construction: Home page of the Directorate of Social and Economic Affairs - documents on the Directorate's work on Roma/Gypsy questions



European Commission

http://europa.eu.int/comm/index_en.htm

- **European Commission**

- **DG XXII Education-Training-Youth**

  http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg22/dg22.html

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Authors:
Demetrio GOMEZ AVILA (Spain),
Alexandra RAYKOVA (Bulgaria),
Rui GOMES (Portugal)
Anne DUSSAP & Corinne GRASSI (France)

Coordination: Anne Dussap & Corinne Grassi

Lay-out: Corinne Grassi

Cover design: Graphic Design Workshop, Council of Europe

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The programme of the course is included in the paper version. Contact the Youth Directorate for details.

Internet version: **Anne Cosgrove**

Council of Europe
Youth Directorate
30 rue Pierre de Coubertin
F- 67000 Strasbourg
Tel: + 33 (0) 3 88 41 23 00
Fax : + 33 (0) 3 88 41 27 77
Web : http://www.coe.fr/youth

General Directorate XXII
Education, Training and Youth,
Unity C.2
Rue de la Loi, 170
B- 1049 Brussels
Tel : + 32 2 295 11 00
Fax : + 32 2 299 41 58
web: http://europa.eu.int/en/comm

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